

SECTION 1 INTRODUCTION

As lead agency, the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), has prepared this Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to evaluate and disclose to the public direct, indirect and cumulative environmental impacts from continued exploration for and development of natural gas resources in the Pinedale Anticline Project Area (PAPA) in Sublette County, Wyoming. Several companies, including Alpine Gas Company (Alpine), BP Amoco (Amoco), Anschutz Exploration Corporation (Anschutz), HS Resources, Inc. (HS), McMurry Oil Company (McMurry), Questar Exploration & Production (Questar), Ultra Resources, Inc. (Ultra), Yates Petroleum Corporation (Yates), and others propose to explore for and develop natural gas resources in the PAPA. In addition, Jonah Gas Gathering Company (Jonah Gas), Mountain Gas Resources, Inc. (Mountain Gas) and Questar propose to construct gathering and/or trunk (sales) pipelines to deliver gas from the project area to existing gas processing plants in southwestern Wyoming. For purposes of this EIS, collectively these companies are referred to as the "operators".

BLM serves as the lead agency because most of the lands (80 percent) in the 308 square mile PAPA are managed by the agency (hereafter referred to as Federal lands) and the BLM has regulatory responsibility for all Federally-owned minerals in the area (about 83 percent of the PAPA minerals). The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE), State of Wyoming (including all affected state agencies) and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) participated in preparation of this EIS as cooperating agencies.

As required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and BLM regulations, this EIS was prepared because BLM has determined that additional exploratory drilling on the Pinedale Anticline could cause significant adverse impacts to the human and natural environments. After a number of years of little or no development, drilling activity on the Pinedale Anticline recently increased dramatically. Under the requirements of NEPA and its implementing regulations, an EIS is required before further actions can be authorized on Federal lands and minerals.

A Draft EIS (DEIS) was released for public comment on November 26, 1999. BLM accepted

public comment until February 4, 2000. This review period (70 days) included a 10-day extension granted by the Wyoming BLM State Director.

In accordance with their responsibilities under NEPA and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reviewed the DEIS for the project. The EPA listed the DEIS in the Federal Register as LO (Lack of Objections, Adequate). The rating indicates that EPA "has not identified any potential environmental impacts requiring substantive changes to the mitigation alternatives" (see Letter 1 in Section 5). After considering the comments received on the DEIS and the EPA rating, BLM determined that an abbreviated Final EIS (FEIS) would satisfy NEPA requirements.

This abbreviated FEIS consists of 7 sections. Section 2 provides a description of a potential management scenario for future exploration and development on Federal lands and minerals in the PAPA. This potential management scenario presents information that may be included in the BLM's Record of Decision (ROD) and is based on operator, environmental group and public comment. The purpose of including this information in the FEIS is to solicit public comment that may be useful in further refining decisions which will be contained in the ROD.

At the request of the operators, Section 3 provides information about additional sales pipeline alternatives in the vicinity of the Jonah Field. Section 4 includes corrections and changes to the DEIS that were primarily identified in comments.

Comments on the DEIS are contained in Section 5 of this FEIS. Comments were received from a number of groups including the general public, operators, grazing permittees, environmental groups, industry groups, and a number of Federal agencies. A total of 235 comment letters were received. BLM responses to each comment letter are included at the end of Section 5.

During the DEIS comment period, the Wyoming Wildlife Federation, Greater Yellowstone Coalition, Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance, Sierra Club and Wyoming Outdoor Council distributed notices/alerts to their membership and asked for comments on the

DEIS. Because letters and e-mails from members of these groups contained essentially the same comments, BLM did not reprint individual letters and e-mails in the FEIS. Rather, BLM responded to the comments contained in the notices/alerts in Section 6 of the FEIS.

In addition to written comments, BLM held a public hearing in Pinedale on January 12, 2000. A total of 86 people signed in at the hearing – 17 gave statements. Many local residents spoke at that hearing. A transcript of the hearing is provided in Section 7 of this FEIS. BLM responses to comments contained in the transcript can be found at the end of the transcript.

Operators and industry trade groups generally supported the Standard Stipulations Alternative whereas the public-at-large and environmental groups largely supported the Resource Protection Alternatives. BLM was encouraged by Amoco's statement that "innovative solutions can be found" to protect the environment in the PAPA while still allowing for development of the leases.

Based on information contained in the DEIS and comments received during public scoping, BLM has identified the Resource Protection (RP) Alternative on Federal Lands and Minerals as its preferred alternative. BLM considers the RP Alternative on All Lands and Minerals to be the environmentally preferred alternative.